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SUBJECT: ISCI CHAIR ABDEL AZIZ AL-HAKIM ON ANTI-MILITIA CRACKDOWN, RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORS, AND SFA

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Flanked by his son and heir-apparent Amar, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Chairman Abdel Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield on April 29 that the GOI and the vast majority of Iraqi citizens are tired of crimes perpetrated by armed outlaw gangs (read Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mehdi militia) and stand with the Iraqi government in its effort to rid Iraq of such groups. Coughing and rasping throughout the 40-minute meeting and looking somewhat weaker than he did during his late-2007 visit to the U.S., Hakim stressed that GOI action against armed groups must succeed. He divulged that a joint delegation from the GOI and United Iraqi Alliance would leave April 30 to discuss "political and technical issues" with Iranian government officials but would not meet Iran's Senior Leader Khamenei. The Ambassador and S/I Satterfield briefed on USG efforts to promote greater engagement of Arab neighbors in Iraq, and Hakim was pessimistic about a near-term change in Arab attitudes toward Iraq. He expressed optimism about ongoing bilateral SOFA/Strategic Framework discussions. End Summary.

No More Armed Outlaw Gangs

¶2. (C) Hakim emphasized several times that the Iraqi people and their political leaders were in agreement that the harmful and destabilizing activities of armed outlaw gangs (read Sadr's JAM, though Hakim never referred to any group by name). Ordinary Iraqis want order, stability, and the freedom to go about their lives with dignity, he asserted, and they have grown tired of armed gangs and their violence. In reply to the Ambassador's question about the Sadr Trend, Hakim stated that while much remains unclear about the Trend's political positions, the Sadrists have clearly decided to side with and protect armed criminals. In contrast, other Iraqi political parties want a secure and orderly environment in which provincial elections can be held. He maintained that the majority of Sadr City residents do not support the Sadrists, and agreed with the Ambassador's point that the GOI can win these people over through improved delivery of services and by reaching out to tribal leaders and other elements in Sadr City who could provide a balance to Sadrists strongmen.

¶3. (C) Rumors of Hakim's imminent death are circulating around Iraq, (for instance, a Wasit PRT contact claimed four days ago that provincial ISCI officials were hurriedly summoned to Baghdad after doctors reportedly told Hakim he had less than 48 hours to live); indeed, Hakim appeared thinner and less vigorous than during his late-2007 visit to the U.S., but he hardly resembled a man at death's doorstep (although a Hakim aide told us that his lung cancer had now spread to his liver and "the prognosis was poor"). He remarked that President Bush had just called to inquire after

his health, and he stated later in the exchange that he conducts many meetings.

¶4. (C) Coughing and rasping throughout the meeting, Hakim revealed that a joint delegation from the GOI and United Iraqi Alliance would travel to Tehran on April 30 to discuss the GOI anti-militia crackdown and other "political and technical issues" with Iranian government officials. He said the delegation would not meet Iran's Senior Leader Ali Khamenei. He had little to say in reply to the Ambassador's statement that Iran deals with Iraq as it does with Lebanon, Gaza and Afghanistan. In a marked departure from past meetings, however, Hakim did not press for a resumption of USG-Iranian talks. Although Hakim's son and ISCI heir-apparent Amar sat at his father's side during the meeting, he deferred to the ISCI Chairman and said little of substance. When he did speak, however, the elder Hakim beamed with fatherly pride.

Neighbors and Strategic Framework Talks

¶5. (C) The Ambassador apprised Hakim of the status of SOFA/Strategic Framework discussions, and Hakim expressed optimism that such talks would yield an agreement that would benefit both nations. He was far less optimistic when the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield briefed on ongoing USG efforts to promote greater engagement of Saudi Arabia and other Arab states with their Iraqi neighbors. Hakim lamented that past efforts had yielded little progress -- though he did cite some improvement in Egypt's stance toward Iraq -- but stated that further efforts must be made. The Ambassador urged more visits by prominent Iraqis to neighboring states, such as a trip Amar made to Kuwait last year that made a highly

BAGHDAD 00001343 002 OF 002

positive impression on his Kuwaiti hosts.
BUTENIS